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Students Help Refugees, Immigrants through ESL Programs

CEDARVILLE, OHIO – Cedarville University students are using English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to help Ahiska Turkish refugees in Dayton and Hispanic immigrants in Springfield adapt to life in the Miami Valley.

Ahiska Turks are a people group who immigrated to Dayton from countries within the former Soviet Union. More than 2,500 Ahiska Turks now reside in the Dayton area.

The Dayton program assists these refugees with homework, reading books, and programs that help them better understand the English vocabulary so they can thrive in their new culture. The program is held weekly at Kiser Elementary School.

The Cedarville students tutor children in first to fifth grade. Many refugee children struggle to pass English proficiency exams. The program, which is in its fifth year, currently has seven tutors that serve 30 students. Along with tutoring, Cedarville's students brought the Kiser students to campus last spring to play games, eat food, and tour campus facilities.

"We get to have really good conversations with the children about their families and culture," said Katie Swanson, a senior cellular and molecular biology major from Ankeny, Iowa. "Working with these students is a highlight to my week because I can see the children improving with their English skills, but we're also building strong relationships with them."

"I don't know of anything that is more important than listening to the little girls who've just had a bad day at school, or who is so excited about learning," said Swanson. "I've been involved in this work since my freshman year and it is so encouraging to see the Turkish refugees improving in so many areas. It's very rewarding to see."

In Springfield, tutors work with nearly 20 young students through Welcome Springfield, a non-profit organization whose meetings take place at Iglesia Hispana Emmanuel—a local church in the community. The Cedarville partnership is with the Clark County Literacy Coalition.

"This program [in Springfield] has been an awesome opportunity for me to use my major and serve in the community outside of Cedarville," said Anna Beckmeyer, a junior linguistics major from Flushing, New York. "I've loved the experience because the focus is teaching, but it's really all about building relationships."

Four of the Cedarville University students who are tutoring in the Springfield program are linguistics majors. Part of the requirements for linguistic majors is teaching English as a second language. The program provides valuable and practical experience as the students work one-on-one with immigrants.

Kiser Elementary is a Neighborhood School Center that is dedicated to helping every child reach success through excellence in academics and interpersonal relationships. The School is committed to helping each student learn to the best of their abilities; become responsible citizens; and acquire the knowledge, attributes, and interpersonal skills needed to successfully compete in a global society.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 3,711 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 100 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings.